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# The Directors of the Chambers of the 'Noordse Compagnie', 1614-1642, and their Networks in the Company

Louwrens Hacquebord, Frans N. Stokman en Frans W. Wasseur

## Introduction

Dutch whaling had begun in the second decade of the seventeenth century.<sup>1</sup> High prices of grain resulted in the stagnation of production of vegetable oils and fats. The increasing demand for these products caused merchants to decide to switch to animal oils and fats. Therefore in 1611 and 1612 English and Dutch merchants respectively decided to launch into whaling.

In Holland three groups of merchants were actively engaged in the new whaling industry: two groups of Amsterdam and one of Zaandam. One group of Amsterdam merchants consisting of Lambert van Tweenhuysen, Jacques Nicquet and Jacques Mercijs, fitted out ships for the north to hunt walrus, entirely on their own and without any support of foreign capital.

The other group, composed of Ysbrant Dobbesz and Leonart Rans, co-operated with some London merchants who were not participating in the English whaling company called the 'Muscovy Company'. This syndicate fitted out one ship for whaling in 1612 and 1613.

The Zaandam shipowners fitted out ships to hunt walrus in the Northern Ice Seas.<sup>2</sup> They were apparently not very interested in setting up a whaling company for despite of the explicit wish of the 'Staten Generaal' that they should be included in the new company, these Zaandam shipowners were not among the later participants.

These three groups of entrepreneurs experienced a great deal of trouble from English whalers in the first years at Spitsbergen, and their hostility was an important inducement for the Amsterdam merchants involved to co-operate with one another. The conflicts in Spitsbergen and the competition expected in Holland led to the founding of a whaling company in 1614, which was called the 'Noordse Compagnie'.

According to the literature this company was an association of independent enterprises or chambers<sup>3</sup> of several Dutch ports, which obtained a collective charter from the Dutch government, the 'Staten Generaal'.<sup>4</sup> The application to the 'Staten Generaal' was signed by L. van Tweenhuysen, Nicquet, Mercijs, Gillis Dodeur, Rans and Dobbesz on behalf of the chamber Amsterdam and Nicasius Kien, Antoni Monier and Dirck Adriaens Leversteyn on behalf of the chamber Delft. In this way the company was granted a

<sup>1</sup> The contribution of Frans N. Stokman was done partly while he was a Fellow at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Studies (NIAS).

<sup>2</sup> Muller 1874, 73.

<sup>3</sup> Translation of the Dutch word 'kamers'.

<sup>4</sup> Muller 1874, Kernkamp 1898, Van Brakel 1909, De Jong 1972, Hacquebord 1984.



monopoly which for some time was open to new participants. In that very same year Enkhuizen and Hoorn joined the company also.<sup>5</sup>

Already in the second year Kien and Dirck Adriaens Leversteyn, directors of the chamber Delft of the new company after they had discovered a new hunting ground near Jan Mayen, tried to hunt whales for the benefit of their own and outside the newly formed company.<sup>6</sup> Their party was called the 'Kleine Noordse Compagnie'. The directors of the other chambers were displeased about this activity and because ships of the chambers Amsterdam and Enkhuizen had discovered this hunting ground near Jan Mayen in the same year they claimed the exclusive rights to hunt at this ground. Based on the 'Generael Octroy' and after a long discussion which lasted from 1615 to 1617 the 'Staten Generaal' granted both parties the right to hunt whales in the seas around Jan Mayen for four years (1618-1622). In this way Kien and Leversteyn had managed to get the right to hunt whales both as directors of the chambers Delft and Rotterdam of the 'Noordse Compagnie' and as directors of the 'Kleine Noordse Compagnie'.<sup>7</sup> When in 1622 the 'Kleine Noordse Compagnie', merged into the 'Noordse Compagnie' they succeeded in extending their shares in the 'Noordse Compagnie' substantially. This placed them in a very comfortable position.

In the years 1625-1630 the 'Noordse Compagnie' went through a crisis. After a small revival in the beginning of the thirties as a result of high whale oil prices the company went rapidly downhill. It even broke up before the expiry of the charter in 1642. From that moment on whaling became accessible to everyone. Small-scale part-ownership enterprises took over the industry and Dutch whaling entered a new phase.

### **The organisation of the 'Noordse Compagnie'**

The chambers of the 'Noordse Compagnie' had formed a cartel in which agreements were made fixing catches and prices. The catches and prices were discussed in two meetings, one in springtime before the hunting season and one in autumn after the season. The fleet of the company was protected by some man-of-wars and Bask whalers were hired to make good the companies lack of knowledge of whaling.

The number of directors in each chamber varied from time to time. From 1614 to 1623 there was a marked increase in the overall number of directors. After 1625 we see a decline in their numbers which makes clear that the enthusiasm for whaling as an investment diminished (table 1).

This development was most clearly shown by the Amsterdam chamber. There, in about 1635, whaling fell into the hands of a very small number of merchants, members of a few families (Dobbesz and Van der Does) who were still whaling in 1656.

If one pays attention to the other, non-whaling, activities of the directors, it is striking that in the early days of the Noordse Company those merchants who took office as directors, saw whaling as only one of the many potential investments. Whaling was a

<sup>5</sup> Hacquebord 1984, 61.

<sup>6</sup> Hacquebord 1991, 17.

<sup>7</sup> Hacquebord 1991, 19.



sideline for them; investing in this new branch of industry meant an even wider spread of their interest.

Table 1. The number of directors in each chamber of the 'Noordse Compagnie'

	Amsterdam	Enkhuizen	Hoorn	Delft	Rotterdam	Zeeland	Total
1614	6	2	-	3	1	-	12
1617	8	1	2	3	5	3	22
1618	10	3	2	3	5	3	26
1623	9	2	2	5	6	4	28
1635	6	1	4	4	2	4	21
1642	3	1	3	-	1	4	12

Until the end of 1623 such men dominated the whaling trade, but owing to the disappointing yield, from it, these investors soon disappeared. Perhaps it was because of the West Indian Company and other lucrative investment opportunities, that whaling lost the interest of the major investors of capital.

The Dutch whaling industry fell into the hands of a very small group of people. Many of them were active as oil-trader and ship-chandler or had a non-commercial profession as quartermaster, inspector of the artillery, purveyor to the admiralty, notary, barrister, mayor, councillor and magistrate (see table 2).

Table 2. The number of directors in non-commercial employment

	Number of directors whose main employment was non-commercial employment	Total number of directors	Percentage
1614	3	12	25 %
1617	5	22	23 %
1623	6	28	21 %
1635	9	21	38 %

## The network analysis

Can we go into further detail? Yes we can with network analysis. By analyzing 151 freight contracts in two periods (1612-1622 and 1623-1642) the dealings of the directors have been investigated. Applying network analysis on these dealings shows us which directors take a central position in the whaling business because of the variety of their contracts with others. It shows us both the relations between the chambers and the centrality of directors within them. The year 1622 was chosen as the cutoff point between the two periods because of the merger of the 'Kleine Noordse Compagnie' with the 'Noordse Compagnie' in that year. Similar applications of network analysis can be found in the field of interlocking directorates among large companies<sup>8</sup>. In the network, two directors are

<sup>8</sup> See e.g. Stokman a.o. 1985 and, for an overview, Mizruchi & Galaskiewicz, 1993.



connected by a line with each other if they have participated in a joint contract. Each line has a value that is equal to the number of joint contracts between the directors. Only lines with a value of two or more joint contracts are considered to eliminate incidental contracts among directors.

The network results are summarized in the figures 1 to 4. In the figures groups of directors are marked by dashed lines. The groups are delineated because of the almost equivalent positions of the directors in the network. We will now discuss the results for each period.

In the period 1612-1622, five groups of directors can be distinguished in the network. The first two groups are given in figure 1 (1612-1622a). The main group consists of five directors. Barent Sweersen is the central director of that group. He has many contracts with all other directors in the group. Ysbrant Dobbesz is the central director in the second group. His overall centrality is even larger as he (and Lambert van Tweenhuysen) links the two groups. Together both groups formed the chamber Amsterdam of the 'Noordse Compagnie'.

The other three groups are given in figure 2 (1612-1622b). The figure shows many contracts among six directors. These six directors formed the 'Kleine Noordse Compagnie' and the many contracts among them show the solid character of this company. Two directors in this larger group are nevertheless distinguished as a separate group because of the large number of joint contracts between the two (seven in total). These two directors are Sijmen van der Does and Jacob Dircks Leversteyn brothers-in-law who were not involved in the discovery of Jan Mayen but soon formed the hard core of the 'Kleine Noordse Compagnie'. The other four directors are Maria/Corn. Mus, Nicasius Kien, Dirck Adriaens Leversteyn, and Adriaen Dircks Leversteyn. It is clear that the 'Kleine Noordse Compagnie' was an activity of directors of the chamber Delft and the solid character made it a dangerous competitor of the 'Noordse Compagnie' and especially the chamber Amsterdam. Their participation in both organisations: the 'Noordse Compagnie' and the 'Kleine Noordse Compagnie', placed Kien and Dirck Adriaens Leversteyn in a powerful position.

The last group consists of only two directors, Frederick Gerrits Wit and Nicolaes Exkens. They were two directors of the chamber Enkhuizen of the 'Noordse Compagnie'. The other chambers of the 'Noordse Compagnie' are missing in our figures because there are no data preserved or because they were not very active in the beginning of the Dutch whaling trade.

Ysbrant Dobbesz takes a very central position in the period 1623-1642 (Figure 3; 1623-1642a). As a single person, he connects three separate groups of directors. The first group is separated from the rest because of the high number of contracts between them. It concerns the group of Sijmen van der Does, Barent Sweersen, Lambert van Tweenhuysen, and Samuel Godin. The two other groups have not many contracts among themselves. They work primarily with Ysbrant Dobbesz on an individual basis. The two groups are separated because of the larger group has more contracts with Ysbrant Dobbesz than the smaller group of two members. All these groups were acting within the framework of the chamber Amsterdam. This chamber bought the share of Sijmen van der



Does in the 'Kleine Noordse Compagnie' and he got a position as a director of this chamber ever since.<sup>9</sup>

In Figure 4, four other groups are shown. The network is very fragmented. Only one line connects two groups, all other lines are within the four groups. The groups represent four different chambers: Rotterdam, Delft, Hoorn, and Enkhuizen.

The analysis shows that most directors were only dealing with directors of their own chamber. The chambers in fact were closed units which means that the picture we have got from the literature is right. Indeed, the 'Noordse Compagnie' was an association of independent chambers without much interaction between the directors of the different chambers of the company. The commercial co-operations took place within the framework of the chambers. In the first period only the directors of the chamber Delft and the 'Kleine Noordse Compagnie' were dealing with each other but as we have seen they had shares in both organisations. Later, in the second period directors of the chambers Rotterdam and Delft (Paul Timmersz, Bruyn van der Dussen and Dirck de Haen) were dealing with each other. A contract, dating from March 15, 1627 is an illustration of such a co-operation between merchants of the chambers Rotterdam and Delft and the former directors of the 'Kleine Noordse Compagnie'.<sup>10</sup> In the 1930s the two chambers Rotterdam and Delft were co-operating so close that they sometimes were seen by the other whalers as one chamber called the chamber of the Meuse.

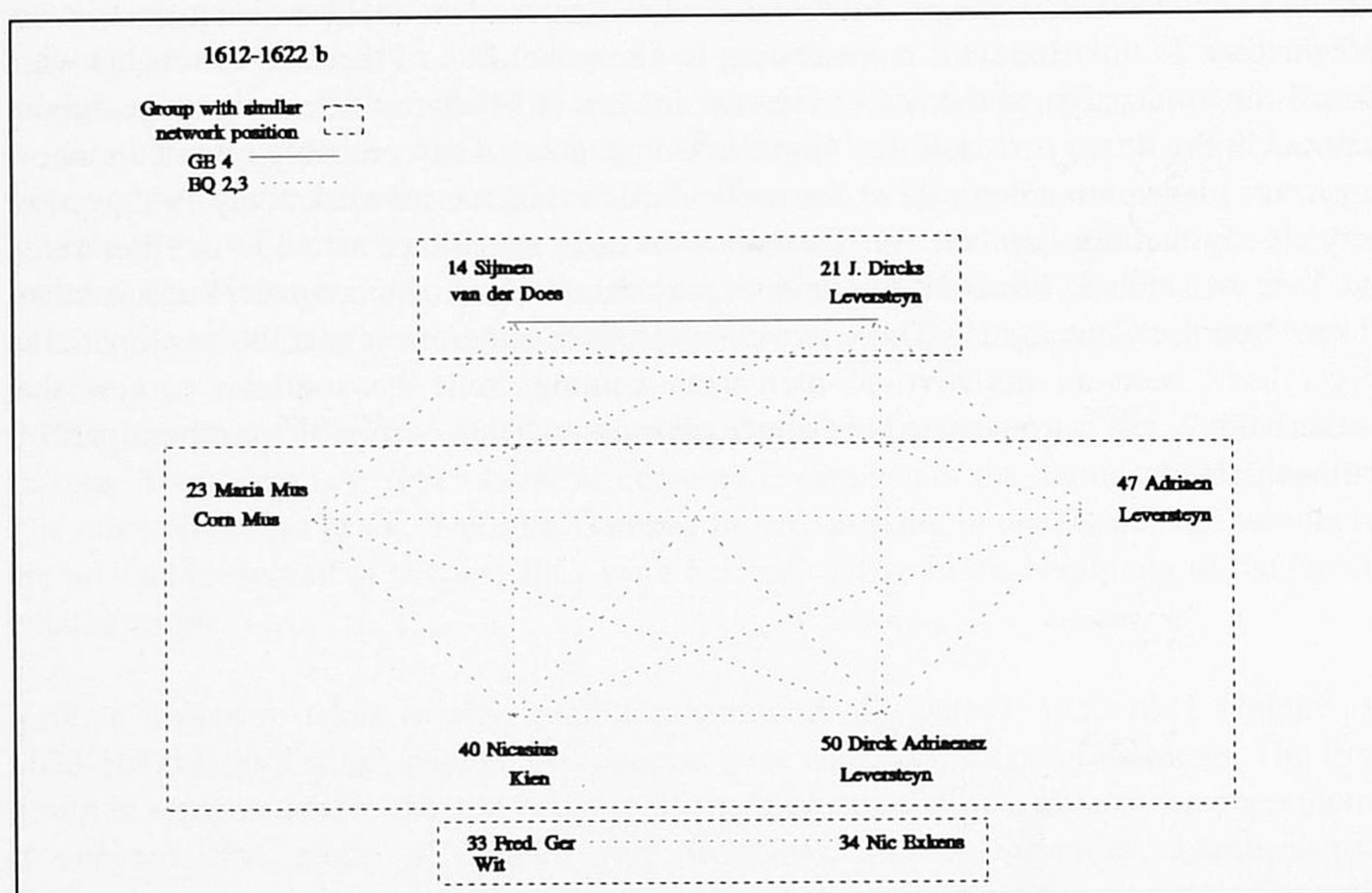
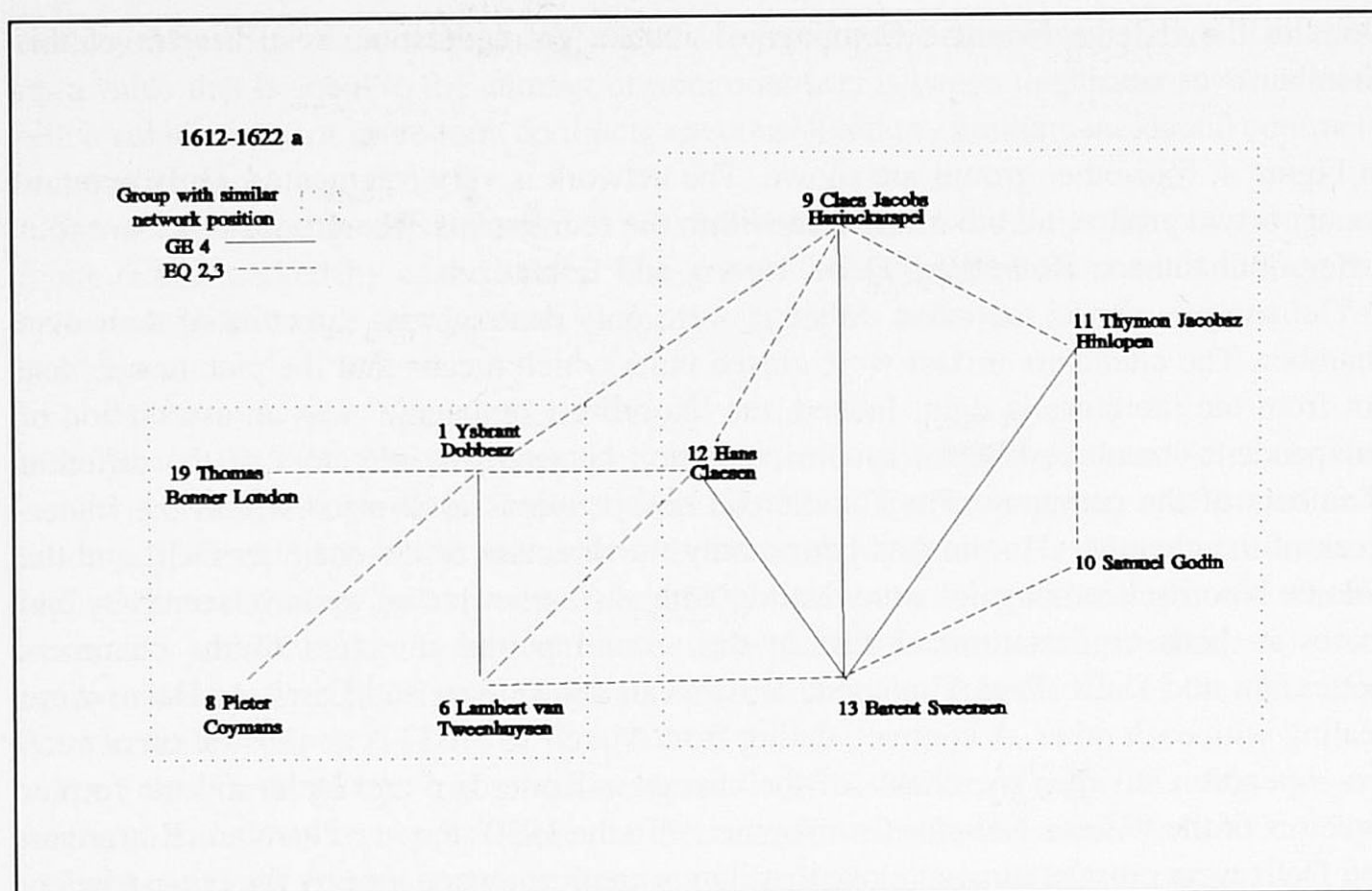
Beside a confirmation of the information from the literature our analysis also gives us new information. In this context it is interesting to know that five of the nine merchants who signed the application to the States General for the 1614 charter never signed a freight contract in the active period of the 'Noordse Compagnie'. They probably invested money but never played an active role in the trade. Beside this, the network analysis shows us very clearly that not Lambert van Tweenhuysen as is sometimes stated in the literature, but Ysbrant Dobbesz has been the most important merchant of the Amsterdam chamber of the 'Noordse Compagnie'. These two conclusions together mean that the whaling trade might have been an initiative of merchants coming from the southern part of the Netherlands<sup>11</sup>, but it was carried out above all by merchants born in the northern part of the Netherlands.

<sup>9</sup> Hacquebord 1984, 62.

<sup>10</sup> Bijlsma 1915, 206, 207.

<sup>11</sup> Muller 1874, 72 and De Jong 1972, 46.







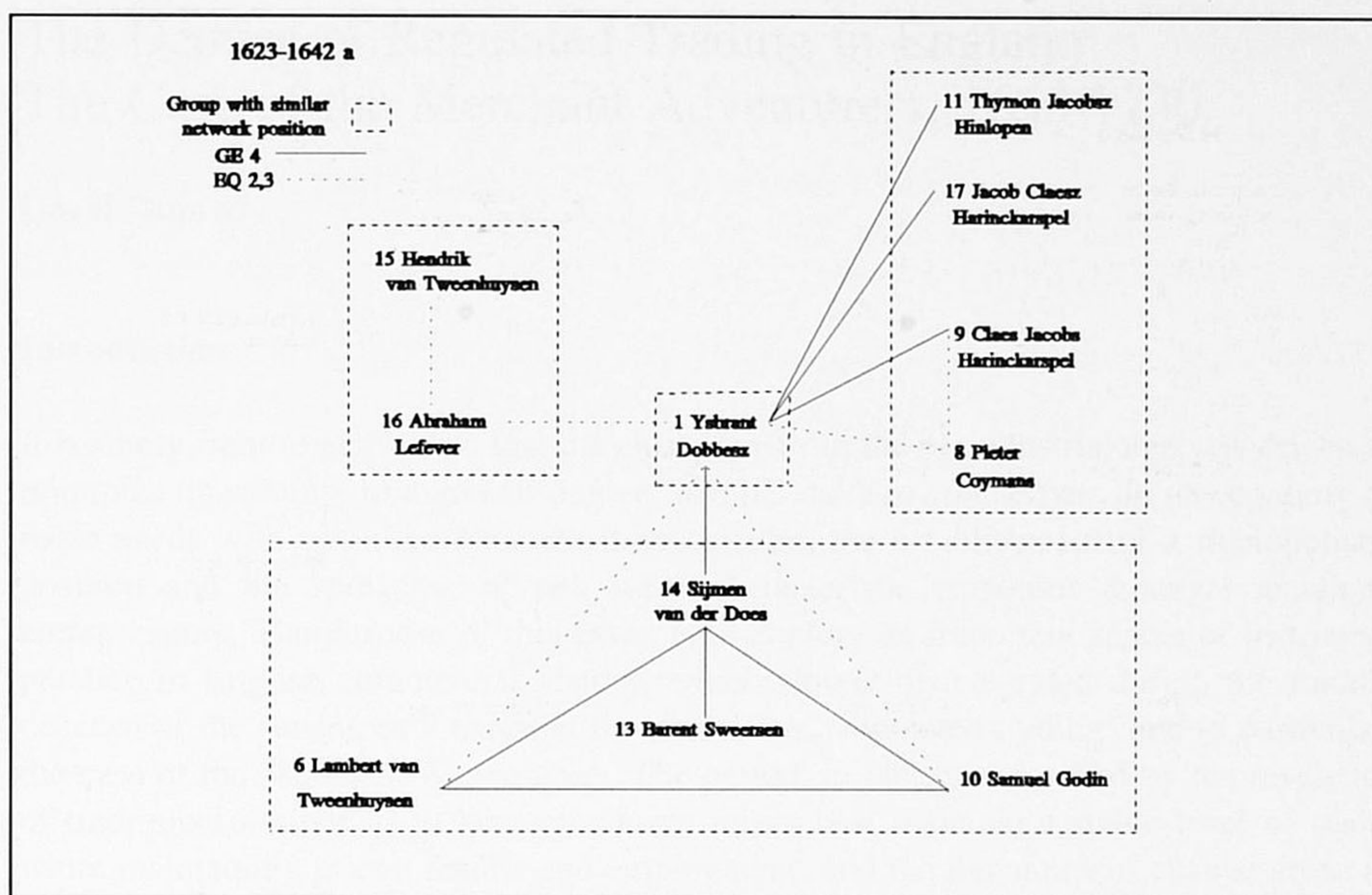


Fig. 3. Groups of directors in the period 1623-1642 (Part A)

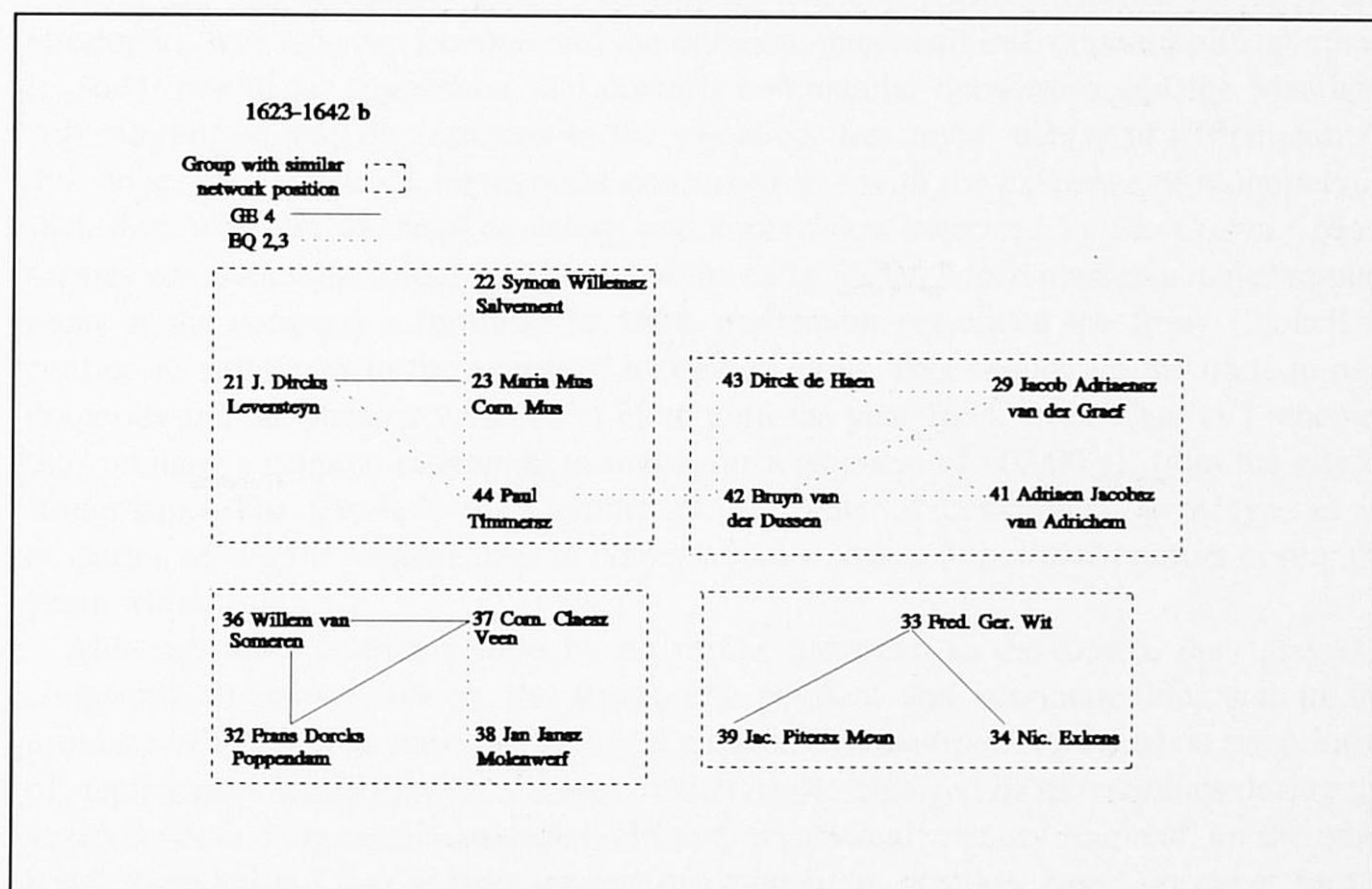


Fig. 4. Groups of directors in the period 1623-1642 (Part B)